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Live Transcript

Essential Media

The Disability Dialogue

What happened in 2025 for people with disability? A year in review.

Captioned by Kasey Allen

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TODD WINTHER: Hi, everyone. I'm Todd Winther. I am wearing a dark-coloured shirt. I am in my 40s. I have short brown hair, welcome. I am an NDIS subject matter specialist at Disability Services Consulting. I would like to welcome you back to another Open Dialogue. These are a place for people with disabilities in our community to talk openly and frankly about the things that matter to us. This is our last Open Dialogue event for the year. Today is all about looking back at 2025 and reflecting on some of the big moments for our community as well as what we're talking about next.

Before I get into it, I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the lands on which we gather. I am joining you from the Turrbal and Jagera lands in Brisbane. I recognise that continued connection to the land and the waters of this beautiful place and acknowledge that they never ceded sovereignty. I want to pay respects to elders and ancestors and any First Nations peoples here today.

KELLY TRELOAR: Hi, everyone. I am a physically disabled policy and advocacy specialist. I am particularly interested in the rights of First Nations people with disability. I am a feminist presenting person, 50 years old. I've got dark red hair, wearing bright red glasses, some fabulous earrings which are red, orange and yellow and wearing a black top. I am joining you from Kaurna country today and I would like to pay respects to elders past and present and acknowledge that this always was and always will be Aboriginal land. In case anyone is wondering, we do a visual description of ourselves so that people who are blind or have low-vision know who is speaking and what they look like. It is just a part of making meetings and events as accessible for everyone as much as possible.

For whose haven't been to one of our events before, welcome. This Open Dialogue is designed to be inclusive, accessible, collaborative, respectful and, importantly, fun. I do need to give a shout out to our sponsors DANA, Inclusion Australia, Alliance20 and the Melbourne Disability Institute. We are funded through an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building, which is an ILC grant, from the Department of Social Services. It has now gone to an acronym that I can't remember with the Health Department.

We do have a little bit of housekeeping today to make sure everyone has an idea of how today will go. We really want to create a safe and open and inclusive space for everyone. Firstly, as part of that, AI tools are not allowed. We know they can be a useful tool for people with disability but we also want to protect everyone's privacy. We will be uploading a transcript to the event page shortly after this event is over and we will also send it to you via email.

Secondly, we try really hard to stick to time so make sure we hear from all of our guests and have time to hear from you, our audience members. This means we might have to interrupt and move things along sometimes and I promise you we're not being rude. We do encourage you to have your camera on if you're comfortable with that so we can feel like we're in the room together but we acknowledge that for some people, they may need to or want to have that off and that's completely fine too. We are going to be collecting all of your comments and questions in the chat throughout the event and may even invite you to ask your question on the microphone if you would like to.

TODD WINTHER: It has been another really big year for people with disability and our community. You might have seen a survey that we sent through before the event, that was totally optional. Don't worry if you didn't get to it. In the survey we asked a few questions to hear your thoughts on what 2025 has been like for you. We will bring up some of the results now because we think it's a great way to kick off the conversation.

KELLY TRELOAR: I will do a visual description. We have a few slides that have charts and on those we have the text responses from people who took the optional survey. The first question is, "Overall, do you think 2025 was a good year for people with disability and their community"? It is an interesting question and we are showing a pie chart that shows 14% said, yes, it was a good year for people with disability. 14% said, no, it was a bad year for people with disability and 71% said there were some good parts and some bad parts.

The second question is about "Why people thought it was a good or bad year?" And we pulled out quotes from the survey. Some of the responses were, "Just too much confusion in NDIS and not getting new information in an accessible way." Some of these will come as no surprise to some of you here today. "Improved broader understanding of what is required to meet NDIS standards, improved service delivery for people living with disability, stronger platforms to give agency to people with disability, greater ways to hear peoples' voices and build upon choice and control."

There is some very different experiences here, just based on those two responses. One more quote we wanted to pull up now. This one is, "There have been many bad things that have occurred in 2025 but the one constant stand-out for me is that our disability community and advocates have continued to show up and support one another and continue to fight the good fight." I think that's really true. I know from my experience in the disability community, I think there is so much strength and resilience in our community and we do show up for one another time after time after time, even when we shouldn't have to. We know we still have a long way to go around disability rights but we're fighting a very good fight indeed. Todd, I will hand it over to you to introduce our first guest.

TODD WINTHER: Thanks, Kelly. That's right. I am excited to introduce our first guest for today, Nas Campanella. I am sure Nas's voice will be very familiar to you because she was the first blind news reader to operate a studio live on air. Many of you would have heard her on Triple J. Nas is now the ABC's National Disability Affairs reporter. She is blind and has Charcot-Marie-Tooth, a condition that prevents her from reading braille. She reports on disability issues across Australia, speaks globally on inclusion and leadership and shares her journey as a mum with disability. Nas also volunteers internationally and is an ambassador to several disability organisations. Thanks for joining us, Nas. We are really excited to have you today. Firstly, can you please give us a visual description of yourself?

NAS CAMPANELLA: Yes, of course. Thank you, so much, Todd for that lovely introduction and thank you more broadly to you and your team at The Disability Dialogue for asking me to come to this final event today. I am thrilled to be here with you all. I want to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land that I am on, the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. In terms of an audio description of myself, I am a white woman in her now approaching late 30s. I have shoulder length dark brown hair. I am wearing a black and white dress with some floral print on it and I have a very boring background behind me, I do apologise. That's who I am.

TODD WINTHER: Let's get into it, Nas. In your role as a journalist, you do an incredible job of shining a light on some of the challenges that people with disability face. Can you tell us about some of the challenges you've reported on this year?

NAS CAMPANELLA: Yeah. I think it's probably an understatement to say that it has been a challenging year for the disability community, Todd. A couple that really stand out to me, was the announcement around the Thriving Kids program. A lot of people felt that they were taken by surprise by that announcement. I think there were also a lot of people who felt that it was a really good thing that for too long there has not been an alternative for people who don't necessarily need to be within the NDIS, that really within the states and territories there has been no services for people with disability. So I think on one hand, there were some people who felt really confident that this could be that next step and that hopefully it would mean some support outside of the scheme, that was very much long overdue. But I think what people needed was to know more about the plan, to have a reassurance that they weren't going to be left in the lurch, that their children and loved ones were not going to be left in the lurch and ultimately, people with disability, I found in speaking to people and their families, they don't actually care where the services come from, they just want to know that, if and when they do need them, that they are there. They are accessible and inclusive. That the people running these services are fully trained in disability awareness. And that the services aren't going to be a one-size-fits-all approach. They will still be a tailored approach for individual circumstances. I think, ultimately, what people want out of Thriving Kids and about the future of disability, whether it's the care sector or children's services, day care, schools, whatever it is that nobody will be left behind and that the only option will not be the NDIS. I think that has been one challenge.

I think the other key one has been discussions around linking Autism to certain medications. I think that the autistic community was left feeling really horrible, really isolated, really questioning who are we? We are autistic. It is who we are. It makes up a big part of who we are and I think a lot of the autistic people I spoke to said to me, "We already face so much prejudice and judgement and questioning in the community about who we are and the way we are and the way we communicate," and this just goes further to fuel that. I remember we were talking about how we would approach that and, for me, it was about going out and finding autistic voices and saying to them, "What do you want to say about this?" It felt like a really powerful piece to do for the community and I was conscious that I was not - I am not an autistic person, but I hoped that people could see that I was a vehicle for allowing to put those autistic voices front and centre on a day that it really needed - those voices really needed to be front and centre.

I also should have acknowledged that hearing this particular piece of news may be traumatic for some people on this call and I apologise for that. I should have actually maybe given a little bit of a trigger warning but I hope you know that you are seen, you are heard, that your experience matters, that you matter and that your way of life matters. So, yes.

TODD WINTHER: On a more positive note, Nas, one of the stories that I read from you this year was about a Deaf playgroup for kids. Can you tell us a little bit about that story?

NAS CAMPANELLA: Yeah. I think we shouldn't shy away from the fact that there are really positive stories out there. While I mostly hear about the negative, I tend to have a really strong philosophy that I do one story that needs to be done and then I do a story that is positive or, in my words, a story for me because it is just as important to look after my psyche because I am hearing about lots of really traumatic and sad stuff every single day. For me, my rule is I do one story that needs to be done, whatever that looks like and then I do a really nice story. One of the goals I had this year was to elevate the Deaf and Deafblind communities. When I was on maternity leave, or parental leave and I was thinking about playgroups to take my little boy to, we went to sensory play, we went off to swimming and we went off to library for story time and one of the things that I thought about was how do mums who are Deaf bring their kids along to these things, when there were no Auslan interpreters and rarely even something as basic as a hearing loop available? I wanted to do a story on some of those services and I found a Deaf playgroup and it was for parents who were Deaf but also children who were Deaf. The story was much broader than that. I wanted to look at what is Deaf culture? Why is it so important? How does it work? I found the most beautiful case study. I found a hearing couple who had two daughters. Their eldest daughter was hearing, but their second daughter was born Deaf. They had made the decision that, because their daughter was born Deaf, it was her birth right to remain part of the Deaf community. They had decided to foster a bilingual approach because, in the mum's words, "If we were going to ask our daughter to meet us halfway and have cochlear implants and try and speak, we need to make sure that she always has access to Auslan so when she gets older, she has the choice as to what language she wants to use and the approach she wants to take." I spoke to lots of different people, including Deaf people, about what Deaf culture was and the need to instil in parents that it's about choice for their children and it was just the most fun, exhilarating wonderful story to put together and we had such a great response from people in the wider community. So it was just a beautiful one to work on.

TODD WINTHER: We touched a bit about this already, but one of the topics that you write about regularly and discuss is obviously NDIS. Can you tell us about any of the stories you've written relating to the scheme that really stand out for you?

NAS CAMPANELLA: One of the big things that we explored this year was the idea of the trust really shifting in the NDIS from the broader public. I think because so much of the discussion in recent time has been about the cost and fraud and the need to cut cost, all conversations that everyone on this call would agree obviously need to happen, but I think one of the things that has happened is that perhaps the broader public has started to see the NDIS as not working as efficiently, for some people who have spoken to me, being a waste of money and are their taxpayer dollars being spent wisely? What we ignore in the conversations, when we solely have media reporting around cost, is we forget that it is still a transformative scheme that has helped hundreds of thousands of people. Many people who were never getting supports and services before the scheme came about. While it, in many peoples words, possibly isn't working as efficiently and there is costs that need to come down, I think that messaging about actually there are a lot of people really benefitting off this and people who are able to now get out of bed, have a shower, go out into the community, find work, make friendships, actually be an active member of our community. I think some of that messaging has been lost. That's definitely one thing we've focused on and some of the other things have been the continuation of the bureaucracy within the scheme and the fact that people are telling us almost on a daily, or weekly or daily basis that funding is being cut with little explanation. Planning meetings are being scheduled, sometimes even without warning. So those are some of the things that we have covered.

I want to say that I think it's really important and I know that everyone as a community is doing this, but it's so important that it is acknowledged that it is a scheme that is still changing peoples' lives. Even though it might not necessarily be the easiest scheme to navigate, there are people who are really - their lives have been transformed because of it and I don't think we can underestimate or forget. It is important to make sure that we do that, that reporters, whether they're disabled or not, continue to reinforce that message as well and you as a community continue to do that as well. I don't want to detract from the idea that there's a lot of struggles at the moment, there absolutely is. I am hearing about them constantly, so I don't want to take away from that and it is important we reflect that but the positive nature of it too.

TODD WINTHER: You talk about the individual progress now through the NDIS about generating lots of positive change. If I can broaden that out a bit and talk about what progress do you think the disability community and the sector has made as a whole this year?

NAS CAMPANELLA: I think one of the key things was the launch of the Autism Strategy. It is Australia's first. We are following other countries that already have one. It was led by autistic people. It was widely consulted on and it is essentially a blueprint for anything and everything from language, right through to the way people want to be described and the key things that are important to the autistic community. I think that needed to be celebrated as a really big win. Clare Gibellini and her team did a brilliant job. I've heard a lot of very familiar names jumping on this call. I have been screen reading software speaking into my ear as everyone comments and jumps on, so I don't know if Clare is on this call but the work that the team did about that, it's really important that we have some really basic standards that the autistic community can point to when they are talking about their rights and what they should have access to.

TODD WINTHER: Because we are talking about the end of 2025 and doing a recap. Can you tell us about one highlight from your year? It doesn't have to be work-related, just one highlight that really stood out to you in 2025?

NAS CAMPANELLA: This is a really hard question and I am actually going to pick two, if that's OK, Todd?

TODD WINTHER: Yes.

NAS CAMPANELLA: Give me the liberty. The first thing that I'm really excited about and I can actually share it with you because it's been shared on social media this morning, is that my really good friend Eliza Hull and I have written a beautiful children's picture book and it will be coming out this time next year and it is called All The Ways We See. It is going to be published through Allen & Unwin. We are proud to have such a big publisher on board. How this book came about is I never read about characters that reflected my experience when I was a little girl. Then when I had my little boy, there were no books that we could read together that he could see his mum reflected in, or my experience, or use the language that I was using, that, "Mummy can't see with her eyes, she sees with her hands." Eliza, who has published a couple of beautiful children's books and a collection of stories from disabled parents, we have been friends for a long time. We have swapped parenting stories for a long time and we decided to team up and write a beautiful text together and we are confident that what we are producing is actually the world's first fully accessible children's picture book and what we have done is we have got text that's in braille, we have easy to turn pages for people who have issues with their dexterity and their fingers. We have QR codes for Auslan interpretations of the book and audio descriptions of the book. We are composing music to go with it and we are trying to make sure that we tackle two things in this book. We have disabled peoples' experiences being more widely reflected in story-telling. But then we hope that anyone will read the book and nondisabled people will be able to start conversations with their children or among themselves and their communities to have some more broader conversations about disability and the way we live our lives. Sorry, that was a long-winded way of explaining that we have a book out next year. I am so excited.

TODD WINTHER: No, that is fantastic news. I can understand why you want to go on about it because it is actually revolutionary.

NAS CAMPANELLA: We hope. So the second thing, if I can quickly share, is that I went into day care a few weeks ago to do the general day care drop-off and a couple of the kids had seen me read Eliza's first children's book, Come Over to My House, on Play School and I explained how I read with my ears and a couple of the kids came over to me and said, "We saw you on Play School, do you think you could read the book to us now?" I pulled the book over and got my audio version out and sat in the circle, even though I was late for work and all the kids sat around and we read this book together. What I loved was that, by them being immersed in disability, they are going to be incredible allies for our community and our next generation of disabled kids. I couldn't be more proud of that.

TODD WINTHER: That's terrific, thanks, Nas. Over to you, Kelly. You're on mute.

KELLY TRELOAR: I didn't realise I had been muted, sorry about that. What I was saying, what a fabulous conversation, Nas and Todd, phenomenal. We have had some questions come in via the chat and we do have time for one or two questions. Unfortunately, it is a bit shorter than usual because Nas has to jump off early today.

NAS CAMPANELLA: Probably also because I talked too much, sorry.

KELLY TRELOAR: Never, we absolutely could have kept going. This is one I am really interested in too. As most of us know, you're the National Disability Affairs reporter at the ABC, which is a national news service and goes beyond that. Your stories reach hundreds of thousands of people. How do you feel about that level of responsibility?

NAS CAMPANELLA: I don't take it lightly. I never have. I have never taken this position for granted. It is a huge responsibility. But it's also a huge privilege. I pitched the idea for this disability affairs round and I did it because, at that time in 2019, the Disability Royal Commission was really getting underway and I wanted to ensure that us as an organisation, that we did that reporting justice. Other reporters would have done a really good job but this needed an extra level of care and attention and empathy. I didn't want to give anyone an excuse, whether it be at the ABC or more broadly across the media landscape in Australia, any excuse to say, "Was that story worth telling?" I also wanted to make sure that we had visible representation of a disabled person and disabled people at the helm of the coverage. I thought it was really important because if people were going to share their deepest traumas with a platform like the royal commission, really for the world to hear and pay attention to, they needed to know that their story was in good hands. That is really why it started, but I think it is really important as well to make sure that we are supporting people in the best way possible to be part of our stories. Many of the people we have worked with either haven't had any experience with the media and, if they have, it's often been quite negative. It has been a really bad experience for them. So part of the job - actually a very big part of the job is really about the people skills. It's about making sure that if someone's part of our story and they agree to be interviewed, do they know what an interview will look and feel like? Do they know who the members of the crew are going to be that turn up to their house? Where are they going to stand? What are they going to be doing? We create story boards for people who need it. We might sit on a couple of Zoom coffee catch-ups with people so they get to know and trust us. We might - I've actually been known to get my producers down on all fours to measure the doorways and spaces in our studios to make sure if someone's coming in in a power wheelchair, that we don't have the awkwardness of, "Sorry, we have got to find another studio because your chair can't fit in here." We need to do that work beforehand so we can make sure our studios are fit for purpose. I will say I am an expert in two disabilities and they are my own. I don't pretend to be an expert in anybody else's. That is why I am the journalist who is asking you all about yours. I won't always get it right. There have been times where I have had lots of emails from people saying, "Why did you use that photo?" or, "That language was off," or whatever. More often than not I'm happy to report that the experience has been really positive for people. In short, I don't take it for granted. It is a big responsibility. I don't always get it right but I try and this community will no doubt continue to keep me in check.

KELLY TRELOAR: I have no doubt either. Thank you for bringing up about the DRC. I myself worked on it and there is a few people in the room. I saw Alastair McEwen earlier and yourself and Natalie that is coming up next, and just your coverage of that, I think, was absolutely critical. Thank you so much. We understand we are running short of time now and we understand you have got to head off for a story, so thank you so much for joining us today and sharing both those stories and also the critical insights with us today.

NAS CAMPANELLA: Thank you for having me. Really appreciate it. I know we are only five weeks away but if you celebrate, Merry Christmas and otherwise, I hope everyone has a safe and happy break.

KELLY TRELOAR: Thanks Nas. I would like to introduce our next guest, Natalie Wade. She is a human rights lawyer and is currently the Associate Commissioner of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission following her role as founder and principal lawyer of Equality Lawyers. Welcome Natalie. Thanks so much for joining us. Could you please give us a visual description of yourself?

NATALIE WADE: I just had some tech issues. Good afternoon, everyone. I am a white woman, with shoulder length brown hair, brown cats eyes glasses and a teal and white scarf and I am sitting in my electric wheelchair at my desk in my office. Very boring.

KELLY TRELOAR: Where are you located? What country?

NATALIE WADE: Thank you for asking. So I am really privileged to be coming to you today from Kaurna country and I pay my deep respects to elders past, present and emerging and would like to acknowledge any First Nations people that are with us today.

KELLY TRELOAR: First off, can you tell us about what you do as the Associate Commissioner at the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission?

NATALIE WADE: Thanks, so much for asking. I think there's probably a really official answer to this and then there's going to be the version that I thought I might share with you all today. It is not contrary to the official version but perhaps I can add a little bit more colour and movement to the role. I was appointed as Associate Commissioner at the same time that Louise Glanville was appointed as Commissioner. So we developed a co-leadership model, where we stand together and lead the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission which, as you all know, is the national regulator for NDIS supports and services.

I guess my role by way of position description is one that is firmly focused on strategic leadership and several of our divisions are brought into me and I provide oversight to them and this sort of thing. I thought it might be a little bit more interesting to share a bit of a week in the life of, rather than just running through the PD. My weeks look a bit like this, everyone. I spend quite a lot of time meeting with external stakeholders and external stakeholders at the commission are quite varied. We sit in the portfolio of the Commonwealth Australian Public Service which delivers the NDIS. In the portfolio there's us at the commission, the NDIA and then the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. The three bodies make up the whole and we all work quite closely together. I meet quite a lot with my colleagues and peers at the agency and at the department. I spend a part of my week meeting with the minister and telling her a little bit about what the commission is up to, with Louise as well. I also spend some parts of some weeks meeting with often CEOs of providers and large industry peak bodies, whether they are from the provider side, like the National Disability Services, or from the disability community side, organisations like DANA or AFDO or any of the DROs. So making sure that there are opportunities and time for us to share ideas and share insights but also have time to ask each other questions and share concerns that might be arising.

I spend part of my week with our internal teams, so internally our legal division reports to me, so many of you may have known me in previous lives as a lawyer, so I continue to be a lawyer at the commission and, in addition to being Associate Commissioner, I'm chief legal counsel here, so I spend some time with our lawyers and then I spend some time with our practice quality division who deliver our behaviour support function under the Act. So, yeah, it is really quite varied.

I also do quite a bit of public speaking and engagement across sector and community. So, yeah, it's really I guess varied and there's certainly no day that's quite the same and there's a lot of work that goes into supporting Louise and I in our roles from our teams and from the commission more broadly which is really fabulous.

KELLY TRELOAR: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you for keeping what is a very fancy official title really real for us and giving that insight. I do want to ask what is it like being a person with disability in a position of leadership in the NDIS space?

NATALIE WADE: I have been giving this a lot of thought lately, Kelly. I have just been in the role now for just over a year. I guess that timing always makes you pause and reflect, plus this time of year tends to do that as well. It's been really interesting as a disabled person in a leadership role like this. It's interesting to me in two ways. One is that it is really important it strikes me and I say this in somewhat the abstract, but it's certainly been my experience that it is incredibly important to have people with disability who have lived experience of what decisions are being made about at the table actually in a decision-making role. I have found that to be really valuable. So I receive services every single day, I can't get out of bed on my own or do any of that sort of gear, totally dependent on services and always have been as an adult since I left my family home. It really strikes me in the conversations that I have, whether they are with the minister, the secretary, internally, whether they're with other portfolio partners, whether they're with other stakeholders, whoever, just the value add that I bring as a person with that lived experience. I also have found, I am pleased to report, that it is valued by my colleagues and it is arguing the weight that it should have but it's certainly - it has been clear that it is a valued and important way to approach decision-making and I think this is something that we need to really invest in.

My other reflection on the flip side is that having a leadership role in the Commonwealth, which is where the NDIS is driven from the Commonwealth Public Service and also the government more generally, having a disability that impacts on your everyday life - you know the way you get around or the way you organise your day, is certainly something that requires accommodation in these sorts of roles and it's something that requires quite a bit of education and thought by me and those supporting me to deliver in this role. For example, I have to travel quite a lot in this role. We have offices over the country and it is really important that Louise and I visit our staff in those offices and hear from them directly, but also we have a lot of commitments in Canberra for estimates and for parliament sitting weeks. Obviously, I am based in Adelaide and Louise is based in Melbourne, so we try and spend part of our time there as well. There is a lot of travel. That has been really interesting to get resourced, in terms of support workers, getting them in those roles, getting people that have good availability, that have flexibility in that role and just getting that rock and rolling a bit. I think it has been quite interesting, in terms of just very much learning as I'm doing, in terms of standing up such a senior role in the Commonwealth.

KELLY TRELOAR: Yeah, absolutely. Thanks for sharing both those perspectives. Acknowledging what I was hearing from you also that how both your lived experience and lived expertise is valued is phenomenal and should be the standard for all workplaces, for all of us but we know some of us are lucky to be in those and others not so much. Just going to move on. Can you tell us about one of the big things that you have worked on this year?

NATALIE WADE: Yeah, absolutely. We have done a few really big pieces of work and I probably can't start this question without acknowledging that maybe as we speak, if not very shortly, the minister is introducing the Integrity and Safeguarding Bill into the parliament and that will see new and also increased powers for the Commissioner to use to strengthen the integrity within the NDIS market and that's such a huge day for the commission and its people and also for providers and people with disability. So it's a pretty big piece of work that is literally, probably happening right now as I'm speaking.

Something else that has been achieved this year is the commission, when Louise and I got here, did not have a disability action plan and it was one of the first decisions that we made as a leadership team, to have that in place and we were incredibly proud to have the disability action plan launched this year. That is a really important piece and the commission has quite a proportion of their staff that identify as having a disability or neurodiversity or 50 or 49% of our staff identify as having - as being carers. So we have this really rich representation of disability in our workforce, either by direct lived experience or it's in their world, in a way. So having a disability action plan that will drive the systems and structural response to inclusion in this place was hugely important and I'm really proud that we have done that.

KELLY TRELOAR: So you should be. They are big things and they are phenomenally life-changing, really. Finally, I know we have just spoken about some of your work highlights but is there another highlight of your year? I don't want to put any words in your mouth but I know there was a little person that came into the world. You could choose that or you could completely choose something else?

NATALIE WADE: Seeing that you mentioned that, I will gratefully take the offer. I have a really incredible ride meeting with you all in an incredible season of life where I have had the good fortune of joining Louise and leading the commission but then I started that journey when I was heavily pregnant and feeling incredibly fat and uncomfortable and way too big for my wheelchair. Then I had little Monty in December last year, so he is as old as my tenure as Associate Commissioner in a way, which is just such a unique experience to be holding a significant role in the Commonwealth and raising this very little baby for most of the year. But it's been wonderful. It has been such a magical time. I am sure there are lots of parents with disabilities in the audience today. It is such a unique experience to parent with a disability and it is something that we don't talk about often enough and I could talk about it all day. It's really been super fun but also very interesting and, yeah, but it has been magical. It is definitely not work-related but one of the best things that has happened in my year.

KELLY TRELOAR: You're right, no-one can prepare you for this, can they? I say most of us do it and we're not Associate Commissioners at the same time, so it is a different level, I want to acknowledge that. Excellent. Over to you, Todd.

TODD WINTHER: That was a really fascinating conversation between Kelly and Natalie. Natalie, I have a few questions for you. The first question comes from Jax. "How have you embedded disability culture and disability justice in your role?"

NATALIE WADE: That is a really good question, Jax. To be honest, I think that is still emerging. What is interesting about my role is that initially, it had by my appointment this inherent vibe of being held by a person with a disability and Louise and I took this co-leadership approach where we really wanted to see the NDIS led by disabled and nondisabled people because that's really what the scheme is, right, it is about everyone coming together and delivering for people with disability. But I think that throughout my time at the commission, you work thoroughly at ensuring that it's not just the vibe of the thing and that we do have, as you say, clear adulation of culture and disability justice built within the structure, not only of the role but also of this place. They're really important values to me and I still feel like, if I'm honest, I'm exploring what that looks like and what that feels like, or what that means in a role like this. It's also in the context of an organisation where people with disability have not always been treated super well. So we had a cultural review delivered by Elizabeth Broderick a few months ago and that found quite clearly that whilst we might be reasonably OK at recruiting people with disability, we don't always do as well when people are in their roles and they need support. So I think there is a really important piece for me to do and to be honest, I feel I will do it with community and not just on my own to really ensure that disability culture and justice are reflected in the structure and systems of the role but also the commission more broadly.

KELLY TRELOAR: We have had a curly question come through from Sam but I have every faith you will handle this very well. "When we talk about the roles of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, are we talking about the experience and quality of peoples' plans or service providers?"

NATALIE WADE: Service providers. The quality of peoples' plans is firmly in the remit of the NDIA. The commission only has jurisdiction over providers registered or unregistered. And so what we say to be quality, either through the code of conduct, or through practice standards or our rules, all relate to providers and workers.

TODD WINTHER: The last question we have is from Andrew. He says, "Which department has remit for the registration of supports? This piece of work has been in the news recently and is about to be introduced into parliament. Can you give us a bit more detail around that please?"

NATALIE WADE: Yes. If I've understood the question right, Andrew, so the commission is responsible for providing a registration scheme, so we are the registration body that providers have to register with. There are some mandatory areas of registration, behaviour support or SDA, and there has been a lot of conversations, as all of you have been part of, around what mandatory registration might look like going forward. We're responsible for the actual registration scheme and the requirements of the NDIS Act. We have a registrar within the commission who delivers that statutory scheme but if your question is more sort of who decides if there's mandatory registration or not? The government decide that, it is a decision entirely for the government and the Department for Health, Disability and Ageing provide policy advice to government on what registration might happen, or might look like. Does that sort of answer your question? But we all work quite closely together and certainly the commission is significantly involved in conversations around registration and Louise and I have been quite clear on the record that there needs to be visibility of disability support services.

KELLY TRELOAR: Jax has another question which we have actually enough time for. The question is, "I'm also really interested in how you work sustainability in your role? How do you have disability leave entitlements at your work?"

NATALIE WADE: That is a really good question, Jax and it is something I have been thinking about a lot. This is iterative for me and it is a work in progress. At a structural level, the commission has - because Louise and I introduced it - disability leave. We offer staff 10 days of disability leave for them to go and attend to whatever needs they need to attend to without it encroaching on their other leave entitlements. That is available to all staff. They don't need to provide any particular evidence of it and they can just tell their manager and that should just flow through. So that is an important structural lever. But in terms of me and how I sort of work it out, I think it's really been a matter of being quite clear with my colleagues about where I'm just going to have to bow out. For example, I have care every night from 5-7. And if I don't have that, then I literally don't go to the toilet. It's probably not too flash for my health. No matter how busy it is, or having it being urgent, we have to get on board with this idea that I need to be offline for these hours of the day. I think just communicating, which is a little harder than it sounds I have found. One does like to think that it is all very invisible and nothing really particularly is needed and I can just ignore what the reality of every day looks like. But I have found it to be an important sustainability feature to just be quite clear and because a lot of my colleagues do not have lived experience of physical disability, they would have not an intuitive idea of how long things take or what things actually look like to get on the loo or to get dressed or to get to an event or this or that. I think as the year has progressed, it has been helpful to be boldly, or kind of boringly clear about what this looks like for me. Also with things like travel, Louise and I have had some really great conversations about this is pretty intense if we design it in this way. I am in a chair and I think we need to think about the design of it and many of you know Louise, many of you are Victorians and she is a progressive thinker so she probably leads those conversations a bit more than me, to be entirely honest. It is important because something that really does some to my mind after a year, is that it is really critical that we do have disabled leaders in these roles but we need to think very carefully and clearly about the sustainability of those roles. I think it's absolutely doable. I am learning a lot and in some amount of time maybe I can go on a podcast and say, "Here is my needs and what you need to know and this is how it can work," because we absolutely need and want the NDIS to be led by people with disability and people without disability but especially people with disability.

TODD WINTHER: Thanks so much, Natalie. We know you have to head off now on this historic day, as you mentioned. We really appreciate you being here with us. Now we are going to take a five minute break before we are joined by our next guest, Carly Wallace, the Director of The Disability Dialogue. Grab a drink or whatever you might need and see you back here in five.

(BREAK)

KELLY TRELOAR: All right. And we're back. Our next guest is the Director of The Disability Dialogue, Carly Wallace and I am privileged to be able to work alongside Carly there. We have talked about what 2025 was like but now we are really keen to hear from Carly about what is next? Welcome, Carly. Over to you.

CARLY WALLACE: Hi, Kelly, thank you. Thanks to everyone who is online today. Really interesting conversation so thank you to Nas and Nat and Kelly and Todd for you guys hosting. It has been an awesome conversation so far. For those joining online who have never met me before or seen me before, my visual description for you. I am a light-skin Aboriginal woman with woven earrings and some grey hairs popping through. That is me being cheeky. I have got some tattoos on my hands as well.

As Kelly said, I am the Director of The Disability Dialogue and my name is Carly Wallace. I come to you from the Jagera country here on the south side of the Brisbane River and I want to pay my respects and I acknowledge country and to all the mob online joining today. I just want to give a shout out to some familiar faces in the room, including a former colleague - it feels weird saying that - but former Royal Commissioner Alastair McEwen, hello to you, who I worked with at the Disability Royal Commission and also the cohost for the Open Dialogue this year event, I see Sam has been in the chat, as well as Andrew and any of the others that I may have missed, good to see you all as well.

As we have heard today it has been a big year for all of us, including The Disability Dialogue. I started here only in July but it feels like about two years ago. I am only still fresh - a little bit fresh but I have been here since then but really excited to tell you about a very new project that we're launching for The Disability Dialogue called the Feature Dialogue. It is a project that explores a problem that has been around for a long time. We talk about to people with disability and their communities to hear what they think. Together we look for new ideas to help improve the situation and our first Feature Dialogue which kicks off tomorrow - I can't believe it, it feels like it has been a long time coming - is on foundational supports and local services that help people with disability, their families and carers. They are especially useful foundational supports for people who aren't a part of the NDIS.

I will bring up a slide show which you can see on the screen now, it has five circles representing five stages that are involved in a Feature Dialogue. I will talk you through the stages to explain how the Feature Dialogue works as best I can. The biggest thing that is really exciting is this has never been done like this before. There is going to be lots of learning along the way but stage zero is called Prepare. That is where we bring together a group of people with lived experience who will guide the project of the Feature Dialogue. This group is called the Working Group.

Stage one is called Explore and it is where we look at what we already know, what the research already says about foundational supports.

Stage two is called Ask. In this stage we have groups of people coming together to have guided discussions and we call these focus groups. The focus groups will come up with ideas for how to make foundational supports work really well for people with disability and, at this stage, we are looking for lots of big ideas.

Stage three is called Decide and it is where smaller groups come together to think about the ideas from the focus groups and talk about them deeply and decide which ones they think are realistic and could work.

Then stage four is called Agree. At this stage the Feature Dialogue Working Group puts everything together in a final report and we share it with big decision-makers. In this case we will be sharing it with Minister Mark Butler and Minister Jenny McAllister. Right now there is a really exciting opportunity for you guys out there who are watching today to be involved in the focus groups. We are looking to find around 40-60 people to be in the focus groups and we will come together to have guided discussions, come up with ideas for how to make foundational supports work well. It is a paid opportunity for those that get chosen and it is a really exciting chance to be part of this exciting new way of thinking through challenges and our community.

If being part of the focus group sounds like something you would like to do, you can find out more by visiting our Disability Dialogue website and also clicking through to Projects and the Feature Dialogue and we are going to share that link in the chat now to find out more for yourselves. Now I know that is quite a lot to take in but you can visit the website to find out more or send us an email and we will put the email address also in the chat. This diagram and an easier read is also available on our website also.

Before I hand back over to Kelly and Todd, I wanted to give you a rundown of some of the events we have planned for next year for more Open Dialogue events. I will show a slide up there on the screen now which has a list of the event topics for next year which I will read through now. In February, we will be exploring the topic of education and that's around barriers to education enrolment for young people exiting school and hoping to go onto higher education. In March we will be talking about relationships and intimacy. In April, we will be talking about ableism and the impact of internalised ableism. In May and June we will be talking about how people with disability are affected by the criminal justice system. So things like the law and other things. That is a really big topic, so we are going to do two events on that one, so like a part one and then again in June we will do part two. We will have the save the dates on the website for those events so you can register for them now and get them in your calendars nice and early.

I want to say a big thankyou to our partners at DANA, the Disability Advocacy Network Australia, Melbourne Disability Institute, Alliance 20, Inclusion Australia and Essential Media for their work on The Disability Dialogue this year. A big thank you to The Disability Dialogue team. My team who are helping in the background and in the front and all the places, thanks for your work this year. We are a fairly new team, so really great to have you all on board. Also I want to say thank you to all the interpreters for this year who have taken part in the Open Dialogues or the Feature Dialogues or any part of this, as well as the support workers as well who have helped to have people participate and everyone that has been involved in The Disability Dialogue, whether you have been here on the chat or in the focus groups, or even done a survey online. It has been really great to see open watch parties as well with some of the Alliance 20 groups and others. However you have participated, it is really great to see you all come together and create a safe space for people with disabilities in our communities, to have conversations and work through the topics that matter to you and to all of us here at The Disability Dialogue. Thank you so much. I am really excited to see what we do next year and, like Nas said, if you celebrate, have a great Christmas and also holiday and make sure you're nice and safe and we will see you in 2026. Back to you, Kelly.

KELLY TRELOAR: Thanks, Carly. We are all looking forward to some really exciting times ahead and I did see a couple of comments pop up in the chat, some really great topics there. We had planned on bringing Nas back for more Q&A but unfortunately you can't predict the news cycle and Nas had to jump off early today. But that is good news, silver lining is there is more time for Carly to answer questions. If you have any questions for Carly, please send them through. I can see our first question for Carly is, "Are there going to be more Feature Dialogues after this one and do we know what those topics of those future Feature Dialogues might be?"

CARLY WALLACE: Yes. At The Disability Dialogue we will be doing two Feature Dialogues. They are six to eight-month-long standing projects that we are looking at the hard topics and unpacking them like we just said and coming up with solutions. We do two of those a year and we are also going to be doing the Open Dialogue throughout the year each month. I know it can be tricky when you are listening Feature Dialogue, Open Dialogue, which one is which? Once everyone sees the Feature Dialogue kicking off, you will see how they work and we will have more coming up. We don't have the next topics chosen yet for a Feature Dialogue, what our next one’s going to be but we also do have a steering committee that I want to give a shout out to before I forget because I will with my ADHD. Shout out to the steering committee who has newly formed for The Disability Dialogue and they will have a really being feed in to future dialogue topics and we will go to them for our second steering committee meeting in early December which is only next week. Crazy. The steering committee are going to feed in with Feature Dialogue topics. If you have an idea for an Open Dialogue topic if you are watching and you think it might be a good topic, we would always love to hear that. Please feed in by emailing us. We would love to hear from you.

TODD WINTHER: A question has been asked about how they can stay up to date about opportunities to be involved in the focus groups for the dialogues?

CARLY WALLACE: Yes. You can sign up to our mailing list and you can send us an email. We send out regular emails to our mailing list to be involved in lots of different things. Our focus groups at the moment, we are recruiting, like I said, so you can sign up for that. Basically, going to our website, info@disabilitydialogue.com.au. That is in the chat now. If you sign up to get updates, regular updates, you will hear about all the things that The Disability Dialogue are doing at what time. If anything you see where you go, "I want that in this type of format," please let us know as well because we're here to make The Disability Dialogue accessible for all, as best we can and we won't know until we know if we haven't already covered it. Please feel free to get in touch, we would love to hear from you.

KELLY TRELOAR: It is Kelly speaking. Doing some pretty big things and someone is keen to know how big The Disability Dialogue team is?

CARLY WALLACE: Maybe if my team members are online - so we have only just got a bit of a team. It has been a crazy couple of months. I started in July as The Disability Dialogue Director. We have Leah if she would like to put her camera on, if she is still online? Leah McPherson is with the dialogue at the moment as a project manager. We have Kelly Treloar who just started who is co-hosting today. Let me see if I can remember Kelly's title - Operations Engagement Manager. I am cheating because I have things that I have to have on my wall that help with my accessible needs to remember things. We also have Bernard Namok on. He is our First Nations Engagement Lead for Queensland. He is based in Cairns, a Torres Strait Islander man. Also Nancy Bates if she is online. Nancy, she is our First Nations lead in SA, based in Adelaide. We also have Caitlyn Hurley, you can see her in the chat sometimes. Caitlyn is our comms officer doing a great job behind the scenes and also Kelly Cox, who you would have seen in other previous Open Dialogues co-hosting. Kelly is our strategic partnerships and sector advisor. Basically, we are the team at The Disability Dialogue who work behind the scenes to make The Disability Dialogue happen, along with our steering committee, our partners and all of you.

TODD WINTHER: There is a question from Sam about if the focus groups for the future dialogues are going to be online or in person?

CARLY WALLACE: Yes, they are going to be online, Sam. The information about the

Feature Dialogue, if you have other questions, feel free to email through and someone can get in touch with you if you have any more questions but they are all based online which is really good for peoples' access needs in 2025 - almost '26.

KELLY TRELOAR: Our newest Disability Dialogue person only started last week. Carly, I can picture your list of people and know you haven't updated it with your pencil.

CARLY WALLACE: No, Laura, I am so sorry, Laura is in our access and inclusion role and she is brand new, hence why she is not on any list on my wall. I'm sorry, Laura. I can't keep count anymore of who is who, which is a great thing, because it means we have a full team. Sorry, Laura.

KELLY TRELOAR: We love Laura. Carly, we have asked all of our speakers today, so it is your turn, what has been one of your highlights from 2025?

CARLY WALLACE: Is it bad to say that I've been able to come to The Disability Dialogue and do some work? It has been a big highlight for me because I stepped out of the disability sector for probably the past year and a bit after some burnout which happens. I know we all can experience that and I took a break away from the sector and then the role came up here at The Disability Dialogue and my highlight has been coming back to the sector and working with people with disability again. Hearing stories and advocating for peoples' human rights. That is what I love to do. To be back in this space has been my highlight for sure.

TODD WINTHER: We are going to wrap things up now. I want to take the opportunity to thank all our speakers for their time today. Nas, Natalie and Carly, they were all incredible to hear from. It has been a super interesting conversation and, like many topics of the dialogue, we can talk about this for so much longer than the hour and a half we had allotted. This is the last event of the year but, as Carly said, you can register for the first event of 2026 now which is kicking off on Wednesday, 25 February. We are still locking in guests but if you register now, you can at least save the date in your diary and to be the first to know when the topic is locked in.

KELLY TRELOAR: One last thing. We want to hear from all of you about what you thought about today's event and we take that feedback really seriously. If you have a few moments to complete a survey, we would appreciate that. When this events finishes a survey will pop up on your screen. It is also available now in the chat and there is also an Easy Read version. Please do tell us what you thought of today and I gather there will be opportunities to talk about what you've thought if you participated in other Open Dialogues. We really look forward to seeing you next year at our event in February after a great break. In meantime we hope you have a lovely festive season and that there is time for rest, relaxation and some fun. Thank you, everyone, and bye for now.

TODD WINTHER: Bye.

(End of Transcript)